DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 391 208 CS 509 156

AUTHOR Malone, Martin J.
TITLE An Emerging Interactional Theory of Communication.
PUB DATE 16 Nov 95
NOTE 27p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (81st, San Antonio, TX, November 18-21, 1995).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Communication Research; *Discourse Analysis; Higher Education; *Interpersonal Communication; *Interpersonal Relationship; Models; Research Needs
IDENTIFIERS *Conversation; Goffman (Erving); *Interactionism

ABSTRACT

An interactional model of communication can be based on Erving Goffman's concept of the "interaction order" and the conversation analytic focus on meaning. Three sets of related ideas provide the intellectual foundations for this approach: actions are designed for recipients; talk is multi-functional; and self presentation is semiotic. These assumptions lead to a theoretical perspective in which it is understood that social actions are designed to make sense to those who participate in them. An example of discourse, called a perspective display sequence, consists of a query, the recipient's response, and the asker's subsequent report. From the early 1950s to the early 1980s, the work of Erving Goffman explicated that role of a third order in social life, neither institutional nor individual, which he named "the interaction order." Goffman sought to describe how the interactional demands of situations are the primary source of structure for the social self. For A. Rawls, self and meaning are the parallel accomplishments of the interaction order. Rawls' summary of a theory of the interaction order emphasizes self presentation, the constraints the order places on social structure, involvement obligations, and morality. Scholars can study meaning interaction by studying how second turns follow first turns, and third turns follow seconds. The meaning of a turn must be interpreted for the next turn to follow successfully. (Contains 4 notes and 36 references.) (RS)

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An Emerging Interactional Theory of Communication*

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Martin J. Malone

Mount Saint Mary's College

Emmitsburg, Maryland 21727

(malone@msmary.edu)

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(Paper prepared for the Speech Communication Association Meetings, San Antonio, Texas, November 16, 1995)

INTRODUCTION

The focus of interactionist research is on how behavior is constructed so that it makes sense to others. The basic assumption is that human social life is only possible because people take account of others' responses to their behavior. For the pragmatist philosopher, George Herbert Mead, human interaction rests on a person's ability to take the "general attitudes of all others" and so "direct his own behavior accordingly" (1934, p. 155). From a symbolic interactionist standpoint, "human beings interpret or 'define' each other's actions instead of merely reacting to each other's actions" (Blumer 1969, p. 79). Social action is designed to be sensible or accountable or recognizable to those at whom it is directed.

This chapter attempts to build an interactional model of

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* This paper is a considerably shortened version of a chapter that will appear in the forthcoming Branislav Kovacic & Donald Cushman (eds), Emerging Theories of Human Communication, Albany: State University of New York Press.

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communication based on the insights of symbolic interaction (SI) and conversation analysis (CA). Both perspectives presume a social world in which people constantly work to make sense to and of each other. Social actors, as producers of actions subject to interpretation, are sensitive to how those actions will be interpreted and so they shape them accordingly; so that they will be interpreted in the way they want them to be. Interactionist approaches to social analysis must be sensitive to this collaborative construction of face to face encounters, to the exquisite mutuality of conversation; to what Boden calls the consequentiality of sequence (1990, p. 254).

The book chapter itself discusses the relevance of the American pragmatism of Charles Peirce, William James, John Dewey, and George Mead; and the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Alfred Schutz as the philosophical foundations for the development of symbolic interaction and conversation analysis.

Due to the brief time we have today, I will just discuss an interactional model of communication that is based on Erving Goffman's concept of the "interaction order" and the conversation analytic focus on meaning.

THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

Three sets of related ideas provide the intellectual foundations for this approach. Broadly, they come from ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, sociolinguistics, symbolic interaction and semiotics.

1. Actions are designed for recipients.

The first assumption is that social actions are designed to "make sense," to be "accountable," to those who are their intended recipients. The meaning of actions is not transparent. Actions must be constructed and performed in such a way that a particular intention is conveyed based on the actor's knowledge of "shared background expectancies" (Rawls 1989, p. 16).

2. Talk is multi-functional.

The second assumption is that talk is multi-functional. Because utterances not only refer to an external world but also to the person who makes those utterances, talk is always self-referential. There is Frege's (1960) distinction between the sense and the reference of an utterance (cited in Ricoeur 1981), but there is also the recognition of the documentary character of uttereances. This basic ethnomethodological concept refers to the fact that behvaior is interpreted as a token of some intended meanings; behaviors stand for or document more than what they appear to be.

3. Self presentation is semiotic

The third assumption is that the self should be understood from a semiotic perspective as an "assemblage of signs" (Perinbanayagam 1991, p. 12). Because talk is always self-referential, and as such, is metonymic, hearers interpret utterances as signs which stand for a larger self. Similarly

Goffman recognizes that the "available repertoire" of "culturally standard displays" used in face to face interaction (whether gestures, postures, facial movements, or utterances), is composed of "sign vehicles fabricated from the depictive materials at hand" that actors use to create their presentations (1983, p. 11).

These assumptions lead to a theoretical perspective in which it is understood that social actions are designed to make sense to those who participate in them. Self presentation takes place in encounters, situations of co-presence in which "persons must sense that they are close enough to be perceived in whatever they are doing, including their experiencing of others, and close enough to be perceived in this sensing of being perceived" (Goffman 1963b, p. 17). It is these face to face interactions that structure our behavior and our need to present our selves. Thus social actors are aware of the need to organize their actions so that they are recognizable tokens of the meanings they intend to convey or the actions they intend to pursue. They are "designed for the recipient" as Sacks said (1992n).

Mutual understanding results from a sensitivity to the necessity of <u>making sense</u> to others. These shared assumptions about sense-making lead to an exquisite sensitivity to the self-referential nature of talk. We are always aware that what we say tells as much about us as it does about the external world. For that reason, conversational talk always provides metaphorical information about the self. It offers others <u>signs</u> of who we

are. If we recognize that the self is an interactional accomplishment, then we must also recognize that it is produced by multiple partners cooperating in the production of a social event.

Examples

While there isn't much time for analysis, let me briefly show three examples that illustrate the claims I've been making. The first is just a short example from Sacks' lectures that shows how even such a basic issue as pronoun use must be understood interactionally instead of grammatically.

> A kid comes into the parents' bedroom in the morning and says to his father, "Can we have breakfast?" His father says, "Leave Daddy alone, he wants to sleep." (1992h, p. 711).

Why does this man refer to himself in the third person and by naming his social status? Grammatically, self reference is supposed to be first person singular. But this example shows some interesting things. By making reference to an identity, you also reference the rights that go with it. Here, its the father's right to sleep late. We also know that refusals are "dispreferred responses" (Pomerantz) and so must normally be accompanied by accounts to justify the refusal. Finally, use of a status distances the speaker from what is being said so it is easier to refuse than use of a first person.

A second example concerns what Doug Maynard has named "perspective display sequences" which include a query ("So what do you think of...?"), the recipient's response, and the "asker's subsequent report" (Maynard 1989, p. 91). In this fashion, the asker appears sensitive to the other's opinions, avoids blatant disagreements, and in some cases, allows the other to state the sensitive or bad news first (see also Maynard 1991). Here is an example from a doctor-patient interaction, in which the physician first elicits the mother's understanding of her son's problem before offering his own diagnosis (Maynard 1992, pp. 337-338).

1. Dr: What do you see? as-as his (0.5)difficulty.
2. (1.2)
3. Mo: Mainly his uhm: (1.2)the fact that he
4. doesn't understand everything. (0.6) and
5. also the fact that his speech (0.7) is very
6. hard to understand what he's saying (0.3)
7. lot[s of time
8. Dr: [right
9. (0.2)
10. Dr: Do you have any ideas wh:y it is? are you:
11. d[o you? h
12. Mo: [No
13. (2.1)
14. Dr: h okay I (0.2) you know I think we basically
15. (.) in some ways agree with you: (0.6) hh
16. insofar as we think that (0.3) Dan's main

17. problem (0.4) h you know does: involve you
18. know <u>lan</u>guage.

Perspective display sequences are designed "to solicit another party's opinion and to then produce one's own report or assessment in a way that takes the other's perspective into account" (1989, p. 91). By apparently "formulating agreement," these sequences "co-implicate" the recipient in the asker's final statement (1991, p. 168). According to Maynard, these "inherently cautious maneuver(s)" tend to be found in "environments of professional-lay interaction," and "conversations among unacquainted parties" (1989, p. 93). In both cases, they appear when speakers can take little for granted about their listeners and when the potential for conflict is high.

Finally, the following sequence illustrates how recipient design structures an attempt to elicit support from another conversationalist.

1 R: Let me ask you, Let me ask you a serious question
2 that has nothing ta do with these lights and these
3 cameras and that sort of thing ok?
4 A: Yeah?

12 R: How much of that (1.6) How much
13 of the mathematics that you have, First of all tell
14 me the, could you tell me the sort of names of the

mathematics. Da ya know calculus for example? Da ya know nonlinear algebra for example?

A: ((softly negative)) unh unh,

R: Ok how much of the how much of the mathematics that you have had, in your tool skill and also for your minor? Did you have a minor in mathematics?

A: in economics?

R: Economics. Ok economics is uh, All right just hold it at the tool skill. is applicable to the way you theorize? How much of it, How much can you use is what I'm asking of that stuff you learned? Could ya give me a ratio? (2.1) Thats a nice thing a ratio

(....)

All?: heh heh heh heh

A: Sure

P: of math( )

A: I can give you a ratio of anything

hhh hh hh hh

R: heh heh heh heh heh three ta one!

In this conversational segment, Rich is trying to get Amy's support for a claim he wants to make, but since Amy is the most knowledgeable person in this group about mathematics, she is the most likely to challenge his claim. Rich circumvents this problem by soliciting her opinion first, then agreeing with it, and finally making his own claim. At that point, Amy is in a

much weaker position to disagree because he has "co-implicated her response in his answer

skip to Goffman p 14

"Let me ask you," both introduces a topic change (Maynard 1989, p. 103) and shifts the alignment between Rich and Amy (Goffman 1981).[1] He repairs the sentence by inserting "serious" to it to indicate that there is a disjunction with previous talk (Schegloff & Sacks 1974). By saying "a serious question," he implies "ok, last topic is over and a new one begins."

Then he adds (line 2):

> that has nothing to do with these lights and these cameras and that sort of thing. Ok?

He distances himself and this question from the situation as if to say: "I'd be interested in your answer to this even if we weren't in this situation."

It is worth remembering Schegloff's point that preliminaries to preliminaries raise a topic "as it pertains to a coparticipant," so that the speaker is then able to talk about it in relation to himself (1980, p. 131). Here the altercasting begins by casting Amy into the role of someone with knowledge sought by the speaker.

The second section begins with Rich attempting to ask Amy questions about her background in terms of her skills and her training.

Two features of this questioning suggest that it is being

carefully constructed to insure a specific understanding: the use of the action projection, "Let me ask you a question," and the presence of "trouble-spots" (Ochs 1979, and Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks 1977) indicated by frequent repetition, word replacement and pauses. Ochs notes that these repairs reflect the speaker's search for a "construction that is appropriate to the addressee" (1979, p. 70).

The actual beginning of the altercasting is plagued with "trouble-spots." Rich seems unable to decide just how to proceed. He has a lengthy turn internal pause (1.6 seconds) after "that" (line 12) and then switches to a clearer referent - "the mathematics that you have," but stops again and takes a new tack, using a disjunction marker, "First of all," to insert new prefatory material. But even here he gets stuck. "Tell me" is mitigated to "Could you tell me." He still seems concerned that he is going to sound too inquisitorial so he changes the form of his utterance from a command (tell me) to a request (could you tell me).[2]

For Rich to imply he has the right to ask Amy to tell him something or that she is obligated to answer him is an "aggravating" imposition. Reference to rights and obligations is direct and undisguised commentary on the nature of the interactants' relationship and for that reason, is open to challenge (Labov & Fanshel 1977, pp. 84-86). Instead, he repairs that implication by rephrasing his request in terms of Amy's ability. She no longer owes him an answer. These recyclings and

repairs are signs of mitigation in unplanned discourse (Ochs 1979).

Rich's perspective display sequence proceeds over eight turns with Amy providing only minimal answers (yeah; unh unh; in economics), while he sets up an elaborate question.

It is not until line 23, that he finally gets to the main question and begins midsentence, relying on the beginning of the question having been provided in the previous turn ("How much of the mathematics that you have had..." line 18):

23. is applicable to the way you theorize?

But he won't let it drop and give her a chance to answer. He goes on specifying the question in one self-correcting phrase after another for three more lines.

24. How much of it, how much of it can you use? is

25. what I'm asking? of that stuff you learned? Could ya

26. give me a ratio?

After a 2.1 second silence, he seems to see how funny that sounds and mocks his own words by reacting to and caricaturing his phrasing

26. Thats a nice thing, a ratio (problem).

at which point there is laughter, first from a number of people, and then from Amy and then Rich himself. This appears to allow him to give up the floor and gives Amy a chance to answer.

The hesitation and wordy construction of the query may in part be a result of the fact that in this interaction between equals, Rich is trying to get a specific result from Amy but

cannot acceptably demand it (cf. Grimshaw 1980, 1981). Thus he hedges, hesitates, rephrases, and continually pads the request for information in order to soften its potential blow. Maynard notes that this is not untypical of perspective display sequences which attempt to show that the asker is sensitive to the other's opinions.

Finally, Amy begins her response (lines 33-48) but it is not really in the form that Rich had asked for. His query was phrased in terms of quantity. "How much" is repeated six times (lines 12, 18, 24). Then he asks for a "ratio" of how much is useful, apparently to how much is not. But Amy's response is rather in terms of a particular approach that is useful.

33. I would have ta say that those math model courses were really good.

Thus Amy has refused, though not necessarily intentionally, to answer in the form Rich has requested. With all the carefully detailed and specified structure of his question, he is still not able to compel Amy to answer the way he wants. We see how difficult altercasting can be, especially when it is between equals.

Rich's strategy of specifying his question very precisely made it clear to Amy that it was an action projection, a setup for something to come. He was asking her this question because he intended to use her answer for certain purposes. He attempted to structure his question in a sufficiently precise way to alleviate her fears of what she might be letting herself in for.

The point is that a strategy that appears to limit someone's options may really be designed for the recipient in that it allows them to see what is coming (Cicourel's "pro-specting"). The questioner seeks to indicate where the line of questioning is going so that the hearer can answer the detail, subtopical questions in an appropriate fashion and not worry to what those answers are committing him/her.

skip if time is short - go to Rawls p. 18

ERVING GOFFMAN AND THE INTERACTION ORDER

Over a period of nearly thirty years, from the early 1950's to the early 1980's, the work of Erving Goffman explicated the role of a third order in social life, neither institutional nor individual; what he named "the interaction order" (1983).[3] From his earliest to his final writing, Goffman sought to describe how the interactional demands of situations are the primary source of structure for the social self. Interactional constraints are not the product of social structure but rather of the needs of self presentation. They are not the products of such standard sociological forces as race, gender, class, or age. Instead they are cross-situational demands whose ends are "the creation and maintenance of self and meaning" (Rawls 1987, p. 143).

The work of Erving Goffman, the ethnomethodologists, and conversation analysts converge on the description of "an interaction order sui generis which derives its order from constraints imposed by the needs of a presentational self rather than a social structure" (Rawls 1987, p. 136). Their work emphasizes the locally produced nature of the demands of the interaction order, i.e., that interaction must satisfy self presentational demands, while being "constrained by, but not ordered by, institutional frameworks" (1989, p. 147).

In one of his earliest essays, "On face-work" (1967a [originally 1955]), Goffman establishes how the interaction order

constitutes face to face behavior. He defines "face" as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (p. 5). Face is an interactive concept, dependent on the back and forth play of actor and audience. In this essay, Goffman describes the interaction order as a set of expectations so designed that "the person tends to conduct himself during an encounter so as to maintain both his own face and the face of other participants" (p. 11). Face to face interaction is then dependent on a "reciprocity of perspectives" (Schutz 1970) between interactants in which each respects the self presentation of the other in expectation of being accorded the same respect.

This simple reciprocity profoundly structures our everyday dealings by creating an order based on the demands of self presentation not social institutions. The threats which might upset this order, such as revelations of hidden "stigmatized" information (Goffman 1963a), or the loss of this respect in "total institutions" such as prisons and insane asylums (Goffman 1961b), were insightfully scrutinized by Goffman for what they said about normal interactions.

In his introduction to the essays collected in Interaction Ritual, (1967), Goffman claims that "the proper study of interaction is not the individual and his psychology, but rather the syntactical relations among the acts of different persons mutually present to one another (1967, p. 2). In an earlier description of the interaction order, he said it provided

regulation, "the kind that governs a person's handling of himself and others during, and by virtue of, his immediate physical presence among them;..." (1963b, p. 8).[4] It is like a set of traffic rules that do not specify where people are going only how they must treat each other while they are getting there.

> Kendon points out that Goffman was at pains in the introductions to his early work to specify that the study of the interaction order was not to be confused with the study of small groups (1961a), the study of psychology (1967) or the study of communication (1969) (Kendon 1988, pp. 15-17). The interaction order was to be seen as its own "sub-field of sociology," one which had not been adequately studied up until this time.

Goffman's conception of the interaction order makes meaning central to face to face interaction. Rawls puts a basic phenomenological issue, the "problem of achieving mutual understanding" (Rawls 1989, p. 148), at the center of her discussion of the interaction order and by so doing shows how the work of Harvey Sacks and conversation analysis extends Goffman's own understanding. For Rawls, self and meaning are the parallel accomplishments of the interaction order. Both are emergent, and locally produced sequential achievements of people in interaction.

> Rawls is critical of Goffman's inadequate and traditional linguistic theorizing and she shows how conversation

analysis provides a more appropriate conceptualization of what talk does. In this way she develops a more sophisticated account of the interaction order, one that treats self and meaning as intrinsically connected concepts.

Rawls (1987) shows how Goffman's work creates a new way of understanding the relation between individual and social structure, an understanding that does not require choosing one or the other, micro or macro as determinative of social life. For Rawls, Goffman's work describes the world in which selves are created and constrained in everyday interaction.

THE INTERACTION ORDER

Rawls describes four elements of a theory of the interaction order.

1. First "the social self needs to be continually achieved in and through interaction" (1987, p. 136). Thus self presentation is a basic feature of the interaction order. This claim shows how Goffman's work is tied to Mead (1934) and symbolic interactionism. It also shows how self presentation is at the center of an interactional model of communication.

2. Second, the demands of self presentation in interaction "not only define the interaction order, but also may resist and defy social structure" (p. 136). As was noted earlier, Goffman's study of total institutions (1961b), shows how the interaction order resists the demands of social structure. Rawls describes this situation by claiming that "it is not up to capable agents to decide whether or not to resist institutional constraint. The interaction order resists these constraints in its own right" (1987, p. 141).

3. "Third, interaction is conceived of as a production order wherein a commitment to that order generates meaning" (pp. 136-7). Goffman (1967b) calls conversation "a little social system with its own boundary-maintaining tendencies,...a little patch of commitment and loyalty..." (pp. 113-114).

That commitment and loyalty are subject to all sorts of assaults which distract from the "conjoint spontaneous involvement" (p. 117) necessary to maintain interaction. Interactants proceed with an awareness that interaction is fragile and that what goes on in the encounter is meaningful because it reflects a choice to maintain the interaction. Conversation analysts have developed this theme in great detail by showing the significance of sequence and context for the intelligibility of conversation.

4. Finally, this leads to a recognition of the basic moral nature of the interaction order because "persons must commit themselves to the ground rules of interaction in order for selves to be maintained" (p. 137). Morality, in this sense, does not reflect larger institutional values of the society. Rather, morality for Goffman, is about a commitment to others and the self presentations they make.

Rawls' summary of a theory of the interaction order emphasizes self presentation, the constraints the order places on social structure, involvement obligations, and morality.

CONCLUSION

The very act of presenting oneself is the "endless, ongoing, contingent accomplishment" (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 1) that is the basic stuff of interaction. Whether we look at how the indexical

meanings of pronouns define "who" is interacting, how gender is reflexively created and recreated in the encounters of style and ideology, how we manipulate each other turn by turn into supporting our claims, or how we settle disputes and maintain a working consensus, it is the interaction order's conjoint demands of sense-making and self presentation that structure the communication.

Because interactants know that self presentations are both meaningful and informative, both intentional and unintentional (as Goffman says, "a potentially infinite cycle of concealment, discovery, false revelation, and rediscovery" [1959, p. 8]), they know that interpretation is necessary. Human interaction is immanently and unavoidably symbolic.

Meaning is the constitutive property of interaction which is necessary for it to continue. It is inherent in a situation and can be understood as the interpretation interactants give to an act and how the original actor responds to that interpretation. In terms of interaction and self presentation, the meaning of an action is the effect it has on subsequent interaction, or it is the answer to Labov & Fanshel's question: "what gets done by what gets said?" (1977). We can study meaning in interaction by studying how second turns follow first turns, and third turns follow seconds. The meaning of a turn must be interpreted for the next turn to follow successfully. Repairs will take care of misunderstandings. Self presentation then takes place turn by turn as intended meanings and interpreted meanings continuously

collide and are reshaped in the process.

NOTES

1. It is not absolutely clear, without a film record, whether Rich's question is directed specifically at Amy or at the group more generally. After endless listening to this sequence, I believe that Rich directed his query at Amy. This is because the two of them frequently engaged in dialogues within the larger conversation, and because, as film of other segments shows, the two shared a couch and were frequently oriented toward each other. It may be that Amy self-selected to answer this question, as the expert, but I think it is more likely that Rich chose her to answer.

2. Compare this to the equally choppy claim made by the doctor (lines 14-18) in the previously cited Maynard example.

3. This section is especially indebted to the discussions and exegeses of Goffman's writing found in a profound series of essays by Rawls including 1984, 1987, 1989 and 1990.

4. Goffman actually uses the phrase "public order" here to distinguish this sort of behavior from that which goes on among intimates, but he is discussing the same topic he originally referred to in his dissertation (1953) as the interaction order and which term he consistently uses later on.

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